

Haida

The Haida are original people of the Pacific Northwest Coast. Their homelands are the islands near the coast of what is today southeastern Alaska and northwest British Columbia, particularly the Haida Gwaii archipelago and Prince of Wales Island. Haida Gwaii means land of the Haida people, a culture group of people native to the islands and with their own language (Haida). They have probably lived there since the end of the last ice age 11,000-13,000 years ago when sea levels were low enough to walk to the islands from the mainland.



www.cackletv.com

The Haida were organized in extended families with a common ancestor. In these family groups, the oldest and highest ranking individual (with closest link to the common ancestor) was named the Chief of the family. Within each family, a person's rank was determined by their relationship with the Chief. The Chief was responsible for distributing wealth among the people. Those who had a higher social status received more, all the way down to the lowest ranked individual. Their society included different classes: nobles, commoners, and slaves (acquired through war or purchase).

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Women and men had specific roles. Haida women gathered shellfish, seaweed, berries, and roots, wove baskets and cloth, and did most of the child care and cooking. Everyone took part in storytelling, artwork and music, and traditional medicine. The Haida chief was always a man, but women held important roles as clan leaders.

Men were fishermen and hunters and sometimes went to war to protect their families. A Haida canoe could be more than sixty feet long and was built to withstand stormy waves. Haida men caught fish and sea mammals from their canoes. They also hunted birds, deer, and small game. Haida fishermen used harpoons, bone fishhooks, and wooden fish traps. Hunters used bows and arrows, and trappers used snares. In war, Haida men fired their bows or fought with spears and war clubs.



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Haida men wore breech clouts and long cloaks. Women wore knee-length skirts and poncho-like capes.



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Chilkat Blanket

Haida clothing was usually woven out of fiber made from cedar bark, but some garments were made of deerskin and otter fur. In cold weather, Haida people wore moccasins and heavy caribou robes, but most of the time, they preferred to go barefoot. For formal occasions, Haida people wore more elaborate outfits, with tunics, leggings and cloaks painted with tribal designs. Some important and wealthy Haidas wore the spectacular Chilkat blankets, which were woven from cedar bark and mountain goat hair. Both men and women sometimes wore basket hats made of finely woven spruce root. The designs and patterns of these hats often displayed a person's status and family connections.

Haida artists are known for their fine basketry and woodcarving art, including carved masks and spectacular totem poles. They had no written language, but the totem pole visually told the story of the clan.



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Raven Mask

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The Haidas would frequently trade with all the other tribes of the Northwest Coast, particularly the Tlingit and Tsimshian tribes. Chiefs from other tribes especially wanted Haida canoes, which were famous for their strength and beauty, and the Haidas liked to buy caribou hides and the fine weavings like the Chilkat Blankets of the Tlingits.

The Haida customs, beliefs, and history were passed down orally through stories, songs, and dances. They had creation myths, and stories about why things happened like the change in seasons. They believed that they were surrounded at all times, by supernatural beings and these spirits were connected to all living things. The link between the spirit world and the natural world was the Shaman or Medicine Man.

Adapted from http://www.bigorrin.org/haida_kids.htm